



## News Release

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### **Safety Message Targeted at Utah Teen Drivers**

*State & Local Agencies Focus Efforts to Prevent Motor Vehicle Crashes*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Motor vehicle crashes continue to kill, hospitalize, and require teens to be treated in emergency departments (ED) in Utah all too often. This year, one out of every 36 teens, 15-19 years will be treated in an ED for motor vehicle crash injuries.

Public Health agencies and the Utah Teen Driving Safety Task Force have decided the time has come to increase efforts in an attempt to change this deadly behavior.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15-19 year-olds in Utah and this simply is not acceptable”, stated Dr. George Delavan, Director Community and Family Health Services Division of the Utah Department of Health (UDOH). “As a result, UDOH, Utah’s 12 local health departments and the Utah Teen Driving Safety Task Force have agreed to focus prevention efforts on teens and increased resources need to be devoted to promising education and media campaigns”, stated Delavan.

In a press conference held today at Cottonwood high school in Murray many individuals spoke of the importance of increasing teen driving campaigns and the importance of parental involvement with young drivers. RJ, a parent of a bright, vivacious and fun loving 17 year old shared the story of her daughter involved in a fatal motor vehicle crash. It was December 22, 2006 at 11:45 pm when RJ received the call that every parent of a teenage driver fears. Her daughter Cynthia had been involved in a head-on collision. RJ rushed to the scene but by the time she arrived she was told her daughter was gone. “Cynthia was not wearing a seat belt that night and unfortunately she was also talking on her cell phone,” said RJ. “If there is one message I would like to get across to teens that would be to always buckle up and hang up your cell phone while driving”. RJ would also like to see both of these behaviors reinforced during drivers’ education training as well.

Health officials also agree with RJ. “By the state and local health departments focusing

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efforts on teen drivers and increasing coordination with safety organizations, like drivers' education, we hope to reverse this increasing problem” said Jennifer Trujillo, Health Educator with Salt Lake Valley Health Department. “Additional funding to expand community prevention efforts, that have been operating with minimal budgets, would also go a long way in getting the message across to teens”, said Terry Smith, Health Promotion Director for Central Utah Health Department.

According to Utah Department of Public Safety the top factor that contributed to fatal teenage-driver crashes in Utah in 2005 was speeding. Crashes where the teenage-driven vehicle contained four or more occupants were five times more likely to be fatal than crashes involving teenage-driven vehicle with fewer occupants.

Wearing a seat belt is one of the best ways to decrease injuries and deaths in a motor vehicle crash. “Parents should set rules for teen drivers including always wearing a seatbelt and insisting that any passengers buckle up,” said Gary Mower, spokesperson for the Violence and Injury Prevention Program in UDOH.

Additional UDOH recommendations to decrease teen motor vehicle deaths and injuries include:

- Increased enforcement of existing seatbelt laws
- Implementation of policies at high schools making parking privileges contingent on student seatbelt use, maintaining a clean driving record, and attending a safe driving class.
- Increased requirements for beginning drivers in Utah’s Graduated Driver License including more practice time behind the wheel with a licensed adult driver prior to getting a license.
- Increased education campaigns targeting drivers ages 15-19 years
- Restricted cell phone use, text messaging, mp3 players use, loud music, food and friends in the car while driving, which are all distractions to drivers and increase vehicle crashes.
- Increased parental involvement with teens to supplement formal driver education training, establish common driving rules, and a parent/teen driver contract that if broken driving privileges will be revoked.

For more information on teen driving safety tips, visit <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/>.

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